

Message Text

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QUOTE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 6206

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

USDOCSOUTH FOR STODDART, INTAFF

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, PINS, PINT, MILI
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SILVER LINING IN CONNECTION WITH CURRENT
LEBANESE SITUATION

1. SUMMARY. DESPITE GENERAL VIEW--WITH WHICH WE ARE IN
AGREEMENT--THAT THERE IS PROBABLY LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF EARLY
IMPROVEMENT IN LEBANESE SITUATION, THERE ARE SOME NEW ELEMENTS
IN PICTURE WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY OFFER WAY OUT OF CURRENT IMPASSE.
THESE ELEMENTS ARE (1) UNCHARACTERISTIC ISRAEL RESTRAINT VIS-A-VIS
FOREIGN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON; (2) POSSIBLE SYRIAN DESIRE
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FOR PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND THUS POSSIBLE (THOUGH
HIGHLY SPECULATIVE) COMCOMITANT SYRIAN MANIPULATION OF LEBANESE
EVTPOB TO STRENGTHEN SYRIA'S HAND AT PEACE TABLE; (3) EVIDENT
SYRIAN POLICY OF BALANCING OFF CHRISTIANS AGAINST MOSLEMS AND VICE

VERSA; AND (4) PLO SETBACKS ON FIELD OF BATTLE COMBINED WITH POSSIBLE FACE-SAVING FORMULA FOR PLO IN CONTEXT OF ELBANESE CONFESSIONAL RESTRUCTURING "IMPOSED" BY SYRIANS. THIS THESIS, ADMITTEDLY SPECULATIVE, POSTULATES A CONTINUING KEY SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON. IT ALSO INVOLVES AN ULTIMATE DISPOSITION ON PART OF PLO, USG, JORDAN AND ISRAEL TO ACCEPT ESTABLISHMENT OF PALESTINIAN STATE ON WEST BANK. HOWEVER UNEAL IT MAY APPEAR, SCENARIO WHICH WE UNFOLD SEEMS TO OFFER ONLY POSSIBLE HOPE FOR SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION OF CURRENT LEBANESE PROBLEM. END SUMMARY.

2. FIGHTING IN LEBANON SHOWS NO PROSPECT OF ENDING SOON AND, IN FACT, DURING PAST WEEK HAS BECOME EVEN MORE INTENSE. ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION EFFORTS SEEM DOOMED TO FAILURE. WITH PALESTINIANS RELIGIOUS FRONTS, PLO BACKLASH AGAINST WESTERN INTERESTS IN BEIRUT BECOMES POSSIBILITY. ON GROUND SYRIANS AND CHRISTIANS ARE RIDING HIGH. CHRISTIANS DEMAND PALESTINIAN CAPTULATION AS PRICE FOR PEACE, WHILE MOSLEMS INSIST UPON SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL BEFORE AGREEING TO CEASEFIRE. SYRIANS ARE NOW ENGAGED IN POLICY OF CHOKING OFF BEIRUT IN EFFORT TO BRING PLO AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS TO THEIR KNEES, AND IN EXTREMIS AN ATTACK ON WEST BEIRUT CANNOT BE PRECLUDED. YET, IT IS PERHAPS POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY SOME ELEMENTS IN THE SITUATION WHICH COULD CONCEIVABLY ARREST THE DOWNWARD SLIDE. FOR THE MOMENT THEY MAY BE ONLY STRAWS IN THE WIND, BUT THEY ARE WORTH LOOKING AT.

3. ISRAELI RESTRAINT. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ISRAEL WAS CREATED WE ARE WITNESSING THE SPECTACLE OF AN ARAB STATE INTERVENING MILITARILY IN LEBANON WITHOUT THE EXPECTED COUNTERVAILING ISRAELI RESPONSE. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT SYRIA'S INTERVENTION, HOWEVER MALADROIT, IS FUNDAMENTALLY IN OUR INTERESTS, ISRAEL'S DECISION TO REFRAIN FROM CROSSING LEBANESE BORDER IS A CRUCIAL FACTOR BOTH IN AVOIDING ANOTHER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR AND IN ENABLING SYRIA TO GO ABOUT ITS TASK OF "PACIFYING" PALESTINIAN MILITANTS IN LEBANON. ISRAEL HAS IN EFFECT GIVEN SYRIA THE FLEXIBILITY IT NEEDS TO BRING SECRET

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THIS FIGHTING TO A CONCLUSION.

4. DOOR REMAINS OPEN FOR PEACE SETTLEMENT. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN LEBANON COULD CONCEIVABLY CONTRIBUTE TO, RATHER THAN DEROGATE FROM, MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT. IF SYRIANS SUCCEED IN ESTABLISHING SOME KIND OF CONTROL OVER PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP AS RESULT OF THEIR LEBANESE OPERATIONS, SYRIANS MAY FEEL THAT THEY CAN GO TO CONFERENCE TABLE WITH IMPORTANT BARGAINING CARD. (THIS ASSUMES, OF COURSE, THAT SYRIANS WANT PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL.) AT SAME TIME, SERIOUSLY WEAKENED PLO LEAVES PLO LEADERSHIP WITH CHOICE OF EITHER LOWERING ITS SIGHTS REGARDING ITS BROAD POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OR BEING SHUNTED ASIDE AS PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT FURTHER FRAGMENTS. WALID KHALIDI, RESPONSIBLE PALESTINIAN

INTELLECTUAL AND ACQUAINTANCE OF ARAFAT, EXPRESSES VIEW TO ME THAT ARAFAT--WHOM HE CHARACTERIZES AS HIGHLY NARCISSISTIC--WANTS BADLY TO HOLD ON. IF ARAFAT CAN BE GIVEN FACE-SAVING FORMULA TO JSSTIFY PLO'S CAPITULATION TO SYRIANS, KHALIDI THINKS A WAY OUT OF THE CURRENT PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN IMPASSE CAN BE FOUND. KHALIDI BELIEVES THAT PRIMARY REASON FOR PLO'S DOING BATTLE IN LEBANON WAS IN SUPPORT OF JUNBLATT'S OBJECTIVE OF POLITICAL REFORM ELIMINATING MARONITE DOMINATION. IF NOW ARAFAT CAN BE ASSURED THAT MARONITES WILL ACCEPT 50-50 SHARING OF POWER (AS AGREED TO IN FEBRUARY BAABDA DOCUMENT), INSTEAD OF PREVIOUS DISPROPORTIONATE FORMULA, KHALIDI THINKS THIS MIGHT PROVIDE REQUISITE FACE-SAVER. PROBLEM, OF COURSE, IS THAT CHRISTIANS ARE CURRENTLY LOADED FOR BEAR AND IN NO MOOD TO COMPROMISE. IF PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP SAW PROSPECT OF ESTABLISHMENT OF PALESTINIAN STATE SOMEWHERE DOWN THE PIKE, PALESTINIAN POWDER KEG IN LEBANON WOULD BE EVEN MORE EFFECTIVELY DEFUSED.

5. MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN BALANCE. ANOTHER POSITIVE ELEMENT IN THE PICTURE IS THE SYRIAN TACTIC, THUS FAR SUCCESSFUL, OF MAINTAINING BALANCE OF POWER IN LEBANON AS BETWEEN MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN FACTIONS. HAVING FIRST ARMED AND SUPPORTED MOSLEMS AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS TO POINT WHERE MARONITE CHRISTIANS WERE ON THE SKIDS, SYRIANS HAVE RECENTLY THROWN WEIGHT ON OTHER SIDE OF EQUATION, TO EXTENT WHERE MARONITES ARE RIDING HIGH. LATTER HAVE, AS RESULT, VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN THEIR ZONE AND MAY NOW EVEN BE TEMPTED TO TAKE A CRACK AT CROSSING DIVIDING LINE INTO MOSLEM PART OF BEIRUT. IT WOULD NOT SURPRISE ME IF, BOTH IN PURSUANCE OF ITS SECRET

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DIVIDE-AND-RULE POLICY AND IN CONNECTION WITH ITS MILITARY SQUEEZE PPLAY AGAINST PALESTINIANS, SYRIA WERE TO ENDEAVOR ONCE AGAIN TO REDRESS CURRENT IMBALANCE IN FAVOR OF CHRISTIANS BY MAKING A GESTURE TOWARD THE OTHER SIDE. (I RECOGNIZE, HOWEVER, AS INDICATED IN DAMASCUS 4544, THAT THERE IS NO PRESENT INDICATION THAT ASSAD IS PREPARING TO DO SO.) ONE CONCESSION SYRIANS MIGHT MAKE TO LEBANESE MOSLEMS IS TO UNDERTAKE TO WITHDRAW UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. THEIR GESTURE TOWARD PLO COULD, AS KHALIDI SUGGESTS, BE A SYRIAN UNDEETAKING TO BRING ABOUT A CONFESSIONAL RESTRUCTURING WHICH WOULD DISADVANTAGE MOSLEMS LESS--WITH SYRIANS USING AS LEVERAGE WITH MARONITES THREAT OF DISCONTINUATION OOF THEIR CURRENT SUPPORT (SEE PARA 6). SYRIANS HAVE STOLEN A MARCH FROM FRENCH IN ADOPTING OLD MANDATE POLICY OF "DIVIDE AND RULE" AND MAY BE SUCCESSFUL AT IT. (JUNBLATT ALLEGED TO ME THAT ASSAD HAD STATED TO HIM THAT SYRIA SEEKS TO ASSUME FORMER FRENCH ROLE OF PROTECTOR OF THE MARONITE COMMUNITY IN LEBANON AND WANTS TO WEAN THEM AWAY FROM WEST.

6. MOSLEM ANTIPATHY TOWARD SYRIANS AND GROWING DISAFFECTION WITH PLO. A THIRD POSSIBLE POSITIVE ELEMENT IS INCREASING MOSLEM DISSAFFECTION WITH PLO, AS WELL AS ANTIPATHY TOWARD SYRIANS. WE HAVE REPORTED GROWING MOSLEM RESENTMENT OVER LAST FEW WEEKS

REGARDING HIGH-HANDED PLO DOMINATION OF WEST BEIRUT. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THIS GROWING RESENTMENT WILL MAKE MOSLEMS--WITH CONSPICUOUS EXCEPTION OF JUNBLATT AND CERTAIN LEFTIST GROUPS--MORE DISPOSED THAN BEFORE TO CIRCUMSCRIBE PLO ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON IN FUTURE. SPIN-OFF EFFECT OF THIS RESENTMENT, TOGETHER WITH MOSLEM DISSATISFACTION WITH SYRIANS, COULD BE A GREATER MOSLEM PRPOENSITY TO RECONCILE THEIR BASIC DIFFERENCES WITH MOARINTE CHRISTIANS. ONE HAS THE FEELING THAT, IF PALESTINIAN FACTOR COULD BE MADE MANAGEABLE, PROSPECTS OF RECONCILAITAION BETWEEN LEBANESE MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS ARE PROBABLY BETTER THAN THEY HAVE BEEN FOR MONTHS AT MOMENT WHEN MOSLEMS ARE ANGRY AT SYRIANS AND INCREASINGLY FED UP WITH PALESTINIANS, SYRIANS MAY NOW INITIATE POLICY OF DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM CHRISTIANS AND START WOOING MOSLEMS (WITHOUT, HOWEVER, SACRIFICING CHRISTIANS). IF THIS HAPPENS, MARONITE CHRISTIANS--SEEING LOOSENING OF ERSTWHILE TIGHT SYRIAN EMBRACE--MIGHT ALSO BRING THEMSELVES TO BURYING HATCHET WITH LEBANESE MOSLEMS. SEVERALLMOSLEM LEADERS HAVE STATED TO ME THAT IF QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON WERE REGULATED, MOSEMS AND CHRSTIANS WOULD FIND WAY TO LIVE TOGETHER AGAIN.

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7. DE FACTO PARTITION. A FOURTH ELEMENT WHICH COULD PROVE HELPFUL, RATHER THAN HARMFUL, IS CURRENT DE FACTO PARTITION OF LEBANON. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS TO SAY THAT DE FACTO PARTITION BETWEEN MARONITE CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEM SECTORS IS BAD BECAUSE IT ENHANCES UNDESIRABLE PROSPECT OF PERMANENT PARTITION. A CASE MIGHT BE MADE THAT, NOW THAT MARONITE CHRISTIANS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN VIRTUALLY ELIMINATING PALESTINIANS AS EFFECTIVE FORCE IN MARONITE ZONE, THEY CAN BREATH MORE FREELY--FEELING SECURE IN THEIR REFUGE. THIS INNER SECURITY MIGHT UNABLE MARONITE LEADERS TO ACT MORE RESPONSIBLY AND LESS EMOTIONALLY. IN THIS SITUATION, IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO DECIDE THAT SINCE PALESTINIANS NO LONGER CONSITUTE A DIRECT THREAT TO THEM, THEY CAN AFFORD TO BE MORE TOLERANT OF MODUS VIVENDI SYRIANS NEGOTIATE WITH PALESTINIANS, RPROVIDED SYRIANS UNDERTAKE TO KEEP PALESTINIANS UNDER CONTROL. (IN ANY CASE, MARONITE REALISTS MUST KNOW THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPEL THE MORE THAN 350,000 PALESTINIANS FROM LEBANON.) MARONITES ALSO KNOW THAT DE FACTO PARTITION OFFERS THEM A BARGAINING CARD WITH LEBANESE MOSLEMS. MOSLEMS ARE NOW REALISTICALLY AND FOR FIRST TIME FACED WITH POSSIBLE AND UNPALATABLE ALTERNATIVE OF DEJURE PARTITION, WHICH IS LIKELY TO HURT HTE LESS ENTERPRISING MOSLEMS MORE THAN CHRISTIANS. IN RETURN FOR RECONCILIATION WITH MAROINTES, MOSLEMS CAN ONCE AGAIN BECOME PART OF A VIBRANT AND DYNAMIC SOCIETY. TRBQE IS, AS NOTED ABOVE, THERE ARE NO PRESENT SIGNS OF MAROINTE CHRISTIAN DISPOSITION TO MAKE CONCESSIONS, BUT THEN SYRIANS HAVEN'T TURNED THE SCREW.

8. ACCORDINGLY, ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO BE OPTIMISTIC THAT LEBANESE SITUATION IS GOING TO IMPROVE, ONE SHOULD NOT RPT NOT TOTALLY EXCLUDE POSSIBLITY THAT PHENOMENA DISCUSSED ABOVE COULD CONCEIVABLY LEAD TO WAY OUT OF CURRENT IMPASSE ONCE PLO IS LICKED ON FIELD OF BATTLE. CERTAIN BASIC POLITICAL DECISIONS, SUCH AS

FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL REFORM IN LEBANON MAY WELL HAVE TO BE POSTPONED UNTIL THE FUTURE. AND SYRIAN OCCUPATION OF MUCH OF LEBANON WOULD NO DOUBT CONTINUE FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD. BUT A SYRIAN-IMPOSED CEASEFIRE, BULWARKED BY A SYRIAN UNDERTAKING TO GIVE PLO A FACE-SAVING WAY OUT, MIGHT OFFER US A BREATHING SPELL.

9. IF THIS SHOULD HAPPEN, U.S. GOVERNMENT COULD HELP SITUATION BY REVIEWING ITS CURRENT POSITION OF HOLDING PALESTINE QUESTION TO LAST IN PEACEMAKING PROCESS AND CONSIDER ADDRESSING PROPOSITION
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THAT CREATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE ON WEST BANK SHOULD BECOME A PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF U.S. POLICY. BY HOLDING OUT TO PALESTINIANS PROSPECT OF SUCH A STATE, U.S. COULD CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO EASING PALESTINIAN PRESSURES IN LEBANON. CONVINCING ISRAEL, TO LESSER EXTENT JORDAN AND EVEN PLO OF DESIRABILITY OF THIS OBJECTIVE IS NO MEAN TASK, BUT IF U.S. WERE TO TAKE THE LEAD--EVEN IF ONLY AT FIRST IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF ADVOCACY--PALESTINIANS COULD BE OFFERED ANOTHER USEFUL FACE-SAVING FORMULA FOR BACKING DOWN IN LEBANON.

10. EVEN IF SYRIANS SUCCEED IN NEUTRALIZING PLO, THEY WILL FACE NUMBER OF PROBLEMS. LEBANESE LEFTISTS AND REJECTION FRONT WILL NOT BE EASILY SWUNG INTO LINE. MARONITE CHRISTIANS, FLUSHED WITH VICTORY, ARE GOING TO HAVE TO CLIMB DOWN FROM THEIR HIGH HORSE. MASS OF ARMS HELD BY MOST OF POPULATION WILL BE CONTINUING DESTABILIZING FACTOR. LASTING EFFECTIVE SECURITY WILL ONLY COME WHEN LEBANESE ARMY IS RECREATED AND GIVEN SOME TEETH. IN THE INTERIM, A CEASEFIRE WOULD HAVE TO BE PRESERVED BY COMBINATION OF SYRIAN TROOPS, ARAB LEAGUE FORCE (MAYBE STRENGTHENED BY EGYPTIAN TANKS) AND, PERHAPS, SECURITY ELEMENTS OF A CONVERTED PLO. A SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RECONCILIATION IN THIS PROCESS WOULD APPEAR TO BE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.

11. FOREGOING IS VERY SPECULATIVE, BUT IT REPRESENTS AN EFFORT TO SEE A POSSIBLE SILVER LINING. SEELYE

UNQUOTE. KISSINGER

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